DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 087 406 IR 000 146

AUTHOR	Collins, Thomas F.; Mantius, Kean
TITLE	Publishers Alert Service: Problems and Recommendations. Final Report.
INSTITUTION	System Development Corp., Santa Monica, Calif.
SPONS AGENCY	Office of Education (DHEW), Washington, D.C.
REPORT NO	TM-5075-000-00
PUB DATE	3 Feb 73
CONTRACT	OEC-72-4368
NOTE	30p.; See also IR 000147
EDRS PRICE	MF-$0.65 HC-$3.29
DESCRIPTORS	Activities; Curriculum Development; Educational Resources; Federal Aid; Federal Programs; Feedback; *Information Services; Information Utilization; Program Effectiveness; *Program Evaluation; Projects; *Publishing Industry; Review (Reexamination)
IDENTIFIERS	*Publishers Alert Service

ABSTRACT

The objectives of the Publisher's Alert Service (PAS) is to announce the availability of educational programs and products to all potential publishers. This report provides the Office of Education with recommendations for improvements to the PAS. It includes: 1) information on the status of current announcements that would normally appear in a monthly Progress Report; 2) a tabulation and summary of publisher responses to the first nine PAS announcements; 3) a summary of the production process and problems of PAS operation during the first nine months; and, 4) recommendations for possible improvements in several aspects of PAS system. The recommendations cover such areas as production schedule, revisions of the Developers Product Data Form, visibility of PAS, ways of getting feedback about successful bids to publishers, and revision of mailing procedures. (CH)

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SYSTEM DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION

FINAL REPORT

PUBLISHERS ALERT SERVICE: PROBLEMS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

THOMAS F. COLLINS
KEAN MANTIUS

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U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
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2 FEBRUARY 1973

TM-5075/000/00

PUBLISHERS ALERT SERVICE: PROBLEMS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Final Report on Contract No. OEC-72-4368

February 2, 1973

The objective of the Publishers Alert Service is to prepare announcements describing USOE-funded educational materials and products. These announcements are sent to publishers to notify them of the availability of materials they might want to publish.

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INTRODUCTION

This report is designed to provide USOE with SDC's recommendations for improvements to the Publishers Alert Service. It replaces the Progress Report for February, and includes information on the status of current announcements that would normally appear in a monthly Progress Report. It also includes a tabulation and summary of publisher responses to the first nine PAS announcements, a summary of the production process and the problems SDC has encountered during the first nine months of PAS operation, and recommendations for possible improvements in several aspects of the PAS system.

Additional deliverable products during the current contract period will include two monthly Progress Reports and a Supplement to the Final Report. The Supplement will present displays of all announcements produced under the contract, together with a summary of the production process for each announcement. The Supplement to the Final Report will be submitted on May 2, 1973.

I. PROGRESS REPORT: JANUARY 15-FEBRUARY 2, 1973

Two new assignments were received during the reporting period, numbers 73-15 and 73-16. This makes a total of seventeen assignments received by SDC to date. Of the seventeen, one was dropped, fourteen have been completed, and two are in the review cycle. The status of each of the announcements on which work was done during the reporting period is described below.

73-14: Achievement Competence Training

This announcement was completed and mailed to Washington in camera-ready form.

73-15: DARCEE Preschool Program

Mr. Cawlfield of CEMREL, Inc. requested that this announcement be pushed through the production process as fast as possible. Additional materials were requested, and a rough draft was written and reviewed. The final text for the announcement is now in typesetting.

73-16: Sourcebook of Elementary Curricula and Programs

Dr. Hutchins of the Far West Laboratory called SDC on January 5 and asked that his announcement be rushed through. However, problems developed at the Lab with regard to the RFP, and we did not receive all the information we needed to complete the rough draft until January 26. A rough draft has now been written and is being reviewed.

Additional Work Performed During the Reporting Period

Production Reports for announcements 73-12, 73-13, and 73-14 were written.

Budget Summary

A total of $15,807 out of the contract award of $33,935 had been expended as of January 21, 1973.

II. SUMMARY OF PUBLISHERS' RESPONSES TO PAS ANNOUNCEMENTS

The objective of the Publishers Alert Service is to publicize educational programs and products to all potential publishers. In each announcement, interested publishers are given information about how to obtain a copy of the Request for Proposals (RFP) that the developer has prepared. One measure of the effectiveness of the service is a tabulation of the number of publishers that requested a copy of the RFP for a given product. Table 1 shows the number of publishers that responded to each of the first nine announcements prepared by SDC.

Table 1. Number of Responses to the First Nine Announcements

Number	Short Title	Number of Requests
72-01	Adelante	13
72-02	Perceptual Skills Curriculum	18
72-03	Self-Paced Physics	10
72-04	Project LIFE	21
72-05	Prereading Skills	22
72-06	COPES	8
72-07*	Technology for Dev. Inst. Materials	15
72-08*	Feather	11
72-09*	Africa	3

*Information on number of responses was collected during the second week in January, 1973. It is possible that the last three announcements represented in the tabulation, numbers 72-07, 72-08, and 72-09, received additional responses after the information was collected.

In addition to contacting the developers, SDC staff members also obtained the membership lists of the three publishers' associations that mail out the PAS announcements: American Association of Publishers, Inc. (AAP); Educational Materials Producers Council (EMPC); and Information Industry Association (IIA).

We tabulated the number of publishers from each association that have responded to one or more announcements. The results of that tabulation are shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Publishers' Association Members Responding to One or More Announcements

Number of Announcements Responded To	Publishers Association Members			
	AAP	EMPC	IIA	Others
1	11	14	1	21
2	6	11	1	4
3	2	5	2	0
4	2	1	0	0
5	1	1	1	1
Total	22	32*	5*	26

*number includes 5 duplicates

A total of 292 announcements are mailed out to members of three publishers associations. Since a few publishers are members of more than one association, we discovered some duplications among the lists. When these were eliminated, the total number of publishers receiving announcements from the

three associations came to 281. In addition, Paul Zurkowski, of Information Industries Association, includes a summary of the information in each PAS announcement in his newsletter; this newsletter is sent to over 300 additional people in the publishing and information industries. The figures indicate that about 600 publishers receive detailed information on products announced through the PAS. A total of 75 publishers responded to one or more of the first nine announcements. Table 3 shows the total number of publishers that requested RFPs for the first nine products announced through the PAS.

Table 3. Number of Publishers Requesting One or More RFPs

Number of RFPs Requested	Number of Publishers Responding
1	45
2	20
3	5
4	3
5	2
Total	75

The figures displayed in Tables 1 through 3, above, give a brief summary of the kind of response received by PAS announcements in the first few months of operation of the service. In addition to these tabulations, the project staff plans to obtain feedback in other ways:

1. We plan to attend the annual meeting of the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development in March, 1973, to talk to publishers about how the PAS is received in their organizations.

2. We plan to conduct telephone interviews with a small number of publishers who have responded to PAS announcements, asking them the following kinds of questions:
   a. Does PAS serve as a useful screening tool?
   b. Did you know about this product before you received the PAS announcement?
   c. What would make the PAS more useful to you?

3. Telephone interviews will also be conducted with some publishers who have not responded to PAS announcements. They will be asked:
   a. Is someone in your company responsible for reading PAS announcements when they come in?
   b. Is there some way that we could make the PAS more useful to your company?
   c. Why have you not requested RFPs on these (first nine) announcements?

These telephone interviews will be completed before we go to the ASCD convention. At the end of the convention, we will be ready to write a follow-up report on the reception accorded PAS announcements by publishers. This report will be included in the Supplement to the Final Report submitted at the end of the contract period.

III. SUMMARY OF PRODUCTION PROCESS

A. OUTLINE OF THE PRODUCTION CYCLE

PAS assignments are received from the Copyrights Office of the U.S. Office of Education. When an assignment is received at SDC, it is checked to see whether there is sufficient information in the package to enable us to write an announcement. In almost every case, it has been necessary to call the developer of the product and ask for more information. When the additional information arrives, a rough draft is written. A project staff member calls the developer and reads the rough draft to him over the telephone, to check for inaccuracies or omissions. If the developer has corrections at this time, they are incorporated into the rough draft and a clean First Draft is typed.

The First Draft is sent to the developer for formal review; a Second Draft is typed incorporating any corrections he may want to make and is sent to the Copyrights Office at USOE. Dr. Bachrach reviews the copy and approves it for production.

The final, approved copy for the announcement is then set in type, pasted up with the artwork that has been selected, and photographed in SDC's duplication department. Photoprints of the pages are sent to the Copyrights Office, and from there to the Government Printing Office for printing. The printed announcements are sent to three publishers' associations for mailing to their members.

B. PROBLEMS

During the first nine months of operation of the Publishers Alert Service a variety of problems have occurred that have had an impact on the quality of the announcements, the speed of production, etc. In most cases, SDC has been able to adjust its production process to eliminate these sources of difficulty; however, some problems still need to be addressed. The problems are listed and briefly described below.

1. Schedule

It is very important that PAS announcements be done quickly, so that they can be coordinated with the issuance of RFPs and so that the schedules of developers and publishers are not delayed by the PAS production process. Several kinds of schedule problems have occurred.

a. Start-up Delays. During the early part of the contract, the source of our greatest delay was the inability to predict when an assignment would arrive from Washington. Too much time was required to clear our schedules of other contract work and start the rough draft of an announcement. We attempted to solve this difficulty in two ways. First, we asked the Copyrights Office to notify us by telephone when an announcement was on the way, thus giving us a day or two of notice during which we could arrange our time for announcement production. This was not as much help as hoped, because the writer on the project staff was in demand for other projects with long-term writing requirements;

these activities generally required completion by the person who started them, and often took a week or two to finish. To alleviate the scheduling problem, the schedules of the writer and the project secretary were revised by committing a portion of each week to PAS activities. In effect, SDC now maintains a constant capability to work on PAS during each week, so that PAS assignments take priority over all other departmental work. This scheme has helped us to improve our production schedule for in-house work.

b. Production Delays. Delays in production process are infrequent in the PAS production cycle. We are fortunate in having our typesetter and artist available on short notice, and usually they are able to start work on announcements immediately. Although we occasionally have a minor delay because of illness or vacations, the effects of such delays are usually minimal.

c. Developer Delays. Many of the delays experienced during the production of PAS announcements occur during the information-gathering phase or during the review cycle: the developer may not be able to perform his formal review immediately on receipt of the first draft; he may fail to send us the additional information we request; he may send information by regular mail rather than by air mail as requested; or he may not have part of the information developed yet. In some cases, a developer has called SDC and requested priority service on the production of his announcement, and has then delayed production by as much as three weeks by not submitting the promised RFP or other materials necessary for production.

2. Printing Quality

In the first PAS announcement produced by SDC, some difficulty was experienced with smudging during the government printing process; the press appeared to be feeding too much ink. Also strip lines from the camera-ready copy provided by SDC showed on the printed copy. Upon further investigation, Dr. Bachrach determined that the Government printing facility was not using a camera process to produce the printing plate. To improve the quality of the copy produced, SDC added a step to the production process: for every announcement after 72-01, we provided photoprints of our artwork rather than the artwork itself. This technique eliminated all strip lines and other production marks. Although problems of over-inking and other mechanical problems during the press run still occur, the use of photoprints has significantly improved the appearance of the printed announcements.

3. Too Few Assignments

The original contract for the PAS provided for up to 40 announcements during the contract period. To date we have produced 16 announcements (the last two are still in the production process). The project staff is capable of handling many more assignments. Some possible reasons for the small number of assignments could be:

a. The Publishers Alert Service is new, and many developers don't know what the service can do for them. Therefore, many of the developers prefer to bypass the service and make their own contacts with publishers.

b. PAS announcements are sent to publishers. Developers, the potential users of the service, do not receive them. The number of copies currently being printed is insufficient to permit us to send samples to potential users, and few, if any, developers are on the mailing lists. Therefore, the service is not sufficiently visible, either to potential users or to the education field in general. This one-way communication should be corrected.

In the final section of this report we will present our recommendations for solving these problems, as well as recommendations for adding to the effectiveness of the PAS.

IV. RECOMMENDATIONS

A. SCHEDULE

The project staff members believe it is possible to meet a goal of 30 days for the production of an announcement, from receipt of the assignment to mail-out of the final, camera-ready copy. Figure 1 shows an overview of announcement production times for the first 14 announcements. As the figure shows, we have achieved our goal in only one case. Various improvements can be made in the announcement production cycle that will enable us to meet the goal in all but a few cases. The improvements are listed below.

1. Revise the Developers Product Data Form (DPDF).

The details of our recommended revisions to the DPDF are given below in a separate section; we mention it here because the recommended changes should serve to speed up the production process and eliminate a major source of delay.

In all but one case out of the first 16 announcements, it was necessary to obtain more information from the developers after we had received an assignment in order to write a rough draft of the announcement. Typically, project staff members receive an assignment in the mail from the Copyrights Office, look over the information in the package, and make a rapid assessment of what additional information is needed. In most cases, the additional information consists of samples of the actual materials to be published. A staff member calls the developer on the telephone and requests these samples

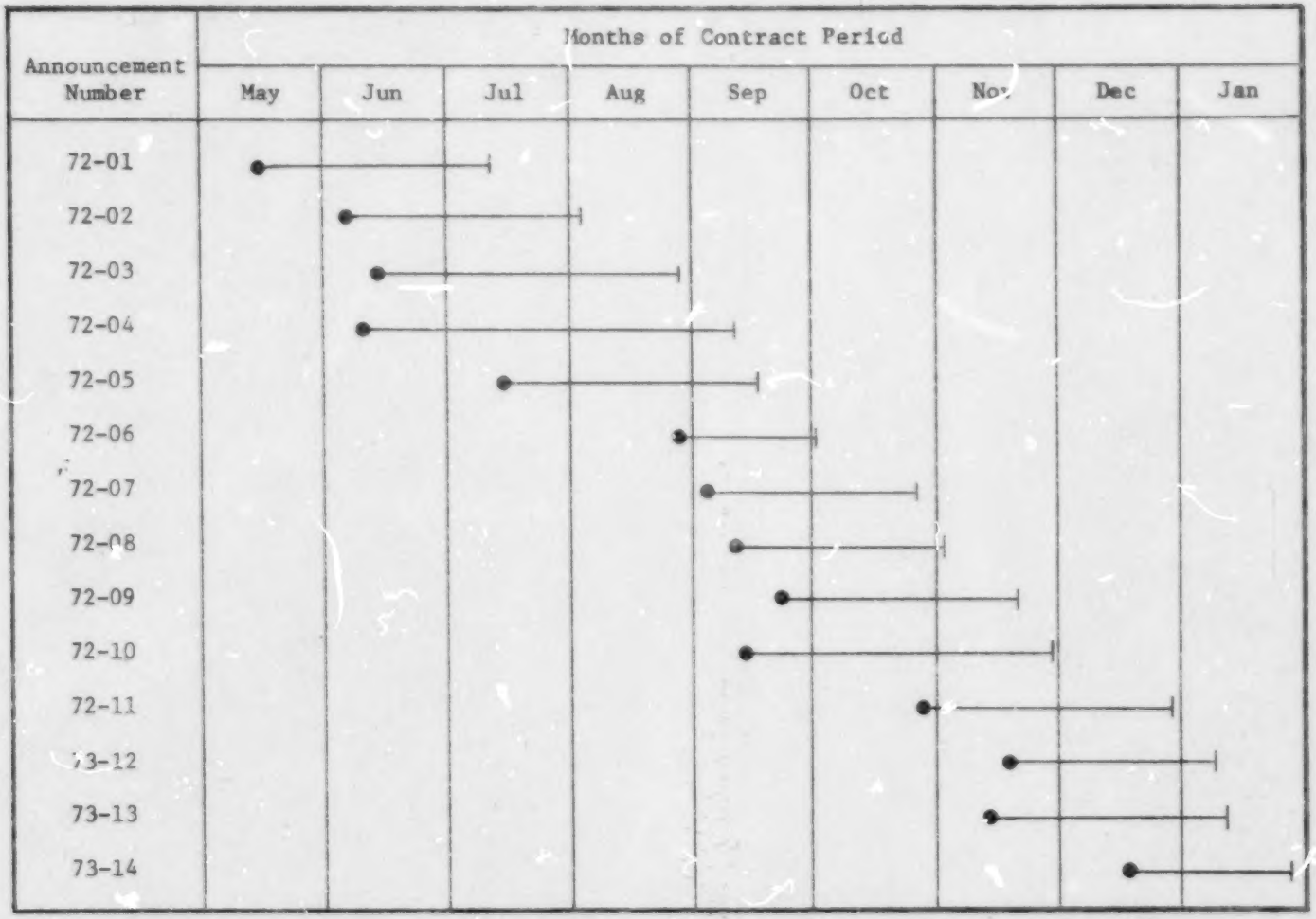

Figure 1. Overview of Announcement Preparation Times

or other materials. It then takes anywhere from two days to three weeks to get the additional materials in the mail. Figure 2 shows some of the delays caused by the need to obtain additional materials. (The arrival of additional materials is not shown for every announcement in Figure 2 because we did not record the date in all cases.)

In a revised version of the DPDF, we recommend that the developer include samples of the materials themselves in the original package of information about the product submitted to the Copyrights Office. This could then be sent on to the PAS staff, thus eliminating a major source of delay in producing announcements.

2. Obtain at Least 80% Commitment of the Contractor's Staff Writer to the Project.

As described in Section II above, we have implemented a scheduling technique that enables the project staff writer and the project secretary to give top priority to PAS assignments. When the capacity of the staff is not being fully utilized in the production of announcements, staff members can work on other project tasks such as those recommended below, or on other projects.

3. Use Fast-Mail and Courier Service as Available for the Review Cycle.

Another source of some delay is the occasional breakdown of the normal U.S. Mail service. We have found that a combination of the new Downtown-to-Downtown mail service and an SDC courier speeds up the review cycle considerably, and we also use this combination for delivering the finished copy. This cuts down the number of places in the production cycle where delays can occur through the non-functioning of the mail.

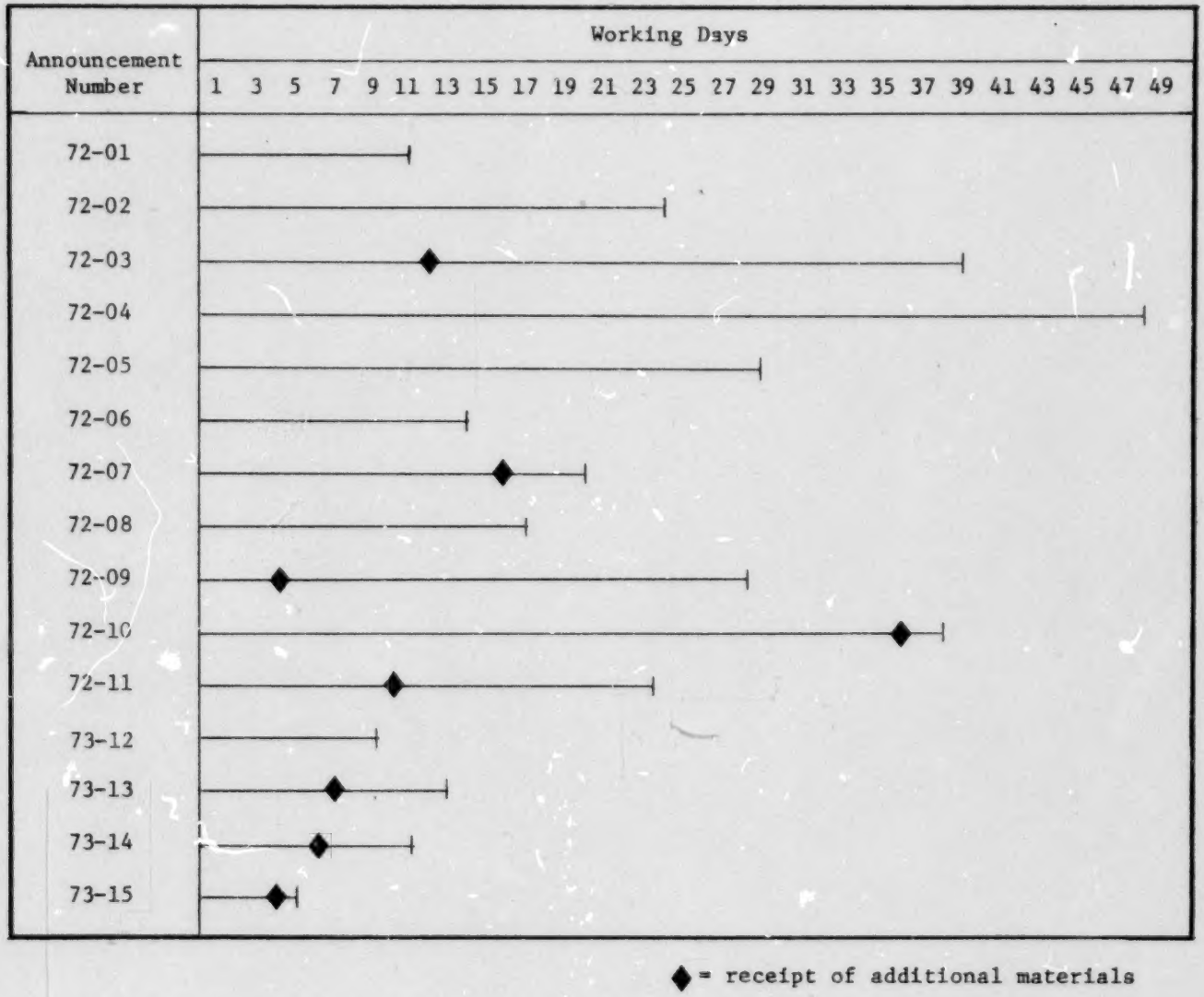

Figure 2. Number of Working Days from Receipt of Assignment to Completion of Rough Draft

B. REVISIONS TO THE DEVELOPERS PRODUCT DATA FORM

We propose to replace the present Developers Product Data Form (DPDF) with a greatly simplified questionnaire indicating the kinds of information we need. It is our opinion that we should not attempt to make the form fit the details of every case; rather, the form should be used to collect the information common to all cases. Minor individual variations can be better handled by a telephone call. The questionnaire will include a request for samples of the actual materials, so that they will be sent by the developer when he first submits the form to the Copyrights Office. It should be printed on colored stock so as to present a warmer appearance, and should be looser in format; that is, the blocked, institutional look of the present form should be avoided. We believe that the required information could be collected on a much more inviting and accessible form, so that the developers will not tend to regard the DPDF as a barrier to use of the PAS. A possible format for the DPDF is shown in Figure 3. In examining this draft format, the reader should bear in mind that type size will vary in different items. For example, those items that appear as a checklist will be printed in smaller type, thus leaving more space for descriptions of the product.

C. VISIBILITY OF THE PAS

One of the difficulties in getting developers to use the Publishers Alert Service is that potential developers never see the PAS announcements. Announcements are sent to publishers, but not to potential users of the service. Therefore, developers do not have a sense of what can be accomplished by the PAS or of what level of service we are prepared to offer them. A number of

1. Name and Address of Organization (include zip code):

2. Person to Contact for Further Information:

3. Telephone Number (include area code):

4. Program Name:

5. Product Name:

6. Purpose for Which Developer Initiates This Product Notice:

- ☐ To start an early dialog with qualified and interested publishers.
- ☐ To seek immediate publisher participation in development.
- ☐ To seek immediate publisher participation in manufacture and wide-scale distribution of a fully developed and tested product.

7. Unique Characteristics, Features, or Objectives of This Product:

8. Target Group Grade Level:

9. Specific Ethnic or Socio-Economic Group:

10. Size of Target Population in the U.S.:

11. Special Physical or Mental Characteristics:

Figure 3. Draft Format for the Revised DPDF
(page 1 of 2)

12. Please list the components of the product or program and give a physical description of each component. Include any equipment necessary to use the component.

Examples:

Teacher's Manual: Book, 8-1/2 x 11, softbound, 1 volume, 243 pages. Used by teachers learning the teaching methods provided by the program.

Audiotapes: Seven tapes, recorded on both sides, running 90 minutes each. Cassette or reel-to-reel, 3-3/4 ips. Used in the classroom. Requires tape player.

Workbooks: One per student, loose-leaf, consumable. Four workbooks, numbered 1 through 4, each used by student for approximately 8 weeks. Workbooks contain 48, 40, 52, and 46 pages, respectively.

Note to Developer: When submitting this form, please include: (1) copies of any recent reports on the product or program development project, and (2) samples of the actual materials to be published, including a Teacher's Manual (if the product or program has one) and some of the materials used with students in the classroom (if applicable).

Figure 3. Draft Format for the Revised DPDF
(page 2 of 2)

our recommendations have to do with correcting this difficulty and making the PAS more visible to people in the education field in general.

1. Produce a Brochure.

a. Format. Project staff members are presently in the process of developing a brochure which will explain the function and methods of the PAS. The format we recommend is a Z-fold single-sheet, which will provide six pages to present the message at relatively low production cost. Figure 4 shows the recommended format.

b. Contents. Number 1 on the drawing indicates the cover of the brochure. On it will be the title, Publishers Alert Service, and the sponsoring agencies. A brief explanation of the PAS will appear on the second page, giving the purposes and objectives of the service and telling the reader how the service works. The third, fourth, and fifth pages will consist of sample announcements. Samples will be reduced 50%. Our experiments with reduction of the selected sample announcements indicate that the texts are still legible at a 50% reduction. These will be set up on the pages to show the variety of products and programs we can handle and the graphic interest we are able to provide. Parts of the back pages as well as the entire front pages will be shown, so that readers can see that additional information and illustrations appear on the back. We feel that a handsome presentation of the samples is the most important part of the brochure. We will use the sixth page to present any further information of interest to potential users.

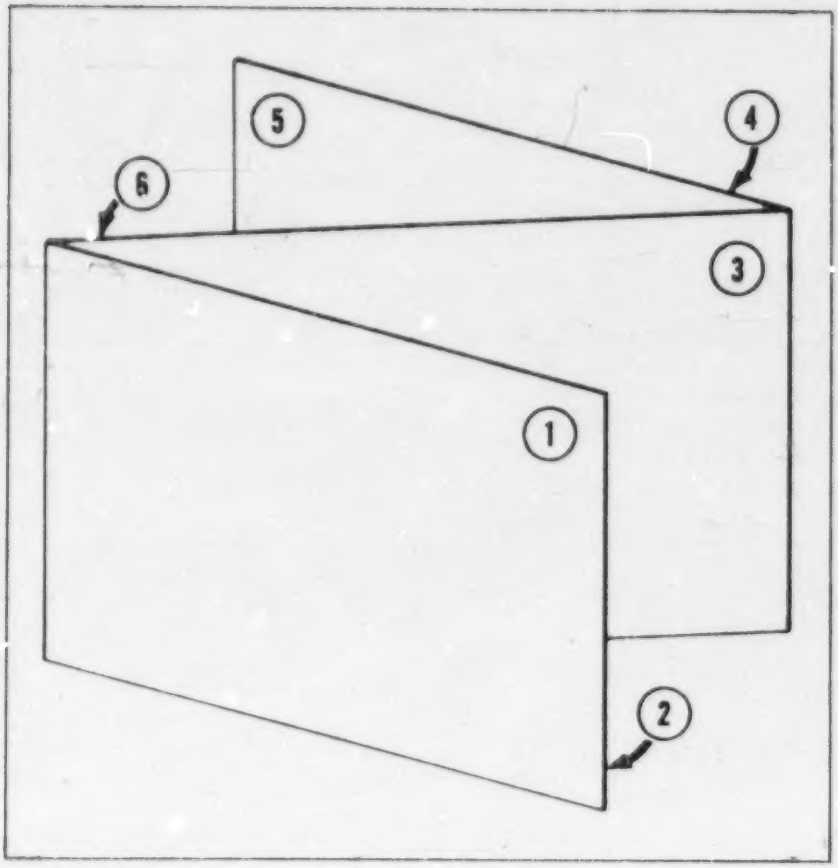

Figure 4. Draft Format for Brochure

c. Specifications. We recommend that the brochures be printed on colored stock and in colored ink, to obtain the maximum color effect without spending the money for color. (Additional expenses for the stock and ink are minimal.) We are obtaining information from the Government Printing Office by way of the Copyrights Office on standard sheet sizes, so as to determine the most economical paper cut for the brochure, and on colored stock available. We will specify color and size when that information becomes available.

d. Uses of the Brochure. It is our belief that an attractive brochure that includes samples of published PAS announcements will be a useful tool in publicizing the service and displaying its results. It can be sent out to potential users of the service along with the revised DPDF, so that developers will have an opportunity to see samples of announcements and to understand the function of the service. The brochure can also be sent to the various education research and development centers and to universities and other concentrations of developers. By this means, the service will begin to be better known in the education field.

2. Distribute PAS Announcements and Brochures to Educational R&D Centers. Since PAS announcements are intended to notify potential publishers of newly developed materials, they are mailed primarily to members of publishers' associations. We recommend that enough copies of each announcement be printed so that they can also be sent to educational research and development centers. One possible method would be to send printed PAS announcements, as well as brochures, to members of organizations that normally distribute newsletters

or contact developers of educational materials. The benefits would be two-fold: first, people in the field would become familiar with the service and its products, and would know what kind of help they could expect from the PAS. Secondly, educational researchers and developers would have an additional source of information about what is going on in their field across the nation. In addition to the publishers' and developers' association members, PAS announcements and brochures might be displayed in the ERIC centers, at educational conventions, and in the regional laboratories. This additional exposure would offer the same benefits described in the preceding paragraph.

D. SEMIANNUAL REPORT

It is possible that some publishers are discouraged from bidding on publication of a PAS product because they feel they are too small to compete successfully with the large publishers in the educational field. This feeling can be counteracted by some form of feedback to the publishing industry about the results of these procurements. We suggest that the PAS contractor produce a Semiannual Report to Publishers that will follow up on the products announced through the PAS.

For each product announced during a six-month period, the report would include (1) a tally of the number of requests for the RFP, (2) the number of proposals received, (3) the name of the successful bidder, and (4) any details of the successful bid. This is public information, and should help stimulate publisher interest. The report would be printed in newsletter format on the front and back of a single sheet. It should look related to, but different from, a PAS announcement; we recommend a different-colored, lighter-

weight stock and a different but related masthead. Printing should probably be handled in the same way as the printing for announcements; that is, the project staff would do the research, write the report, and supply camera-ready copy to the Copyrights Office for in-house printing.

E. POSSIBLE REVISION OF MAILING PROCEDURES

Mailing procedures for PAS announcements could be streamlined by having the announcements mailed out to publishers by the PAS contractor. The advantages and methods of such a scheme are discussed below.

1. Advantages

If announcements were mailed from one location, duplications in the mailing lists could be eliminated. In addition, the list could be expanded and/or corrected as necessary with a minimum of difficulty. All requests to be added to the mailing list could be handled by one person, and better control over the list could be maintained. Since the list would no longer be tied to the publishing industry, people in the field of educational research, as well as educational materials development centers, regional laboratories, universities, etc., could be readily added to the list. Sending PAS materials to these additional people would increase the visibility of the PAS, attract more users, and serve as a valuable communications avenue in the field of educational research (see Section IV-C, above). Delays caused by packages going astray in the mail would be reduced, and one or two packages of printed announcements would have to be mailed by the Copyrights Office instead of three.

2. Method

The Downtown-to-Downtown mail service between Washington and 31 other major cities permits packages to be mailed in one city any time up to five o'clock on one day and received in another city by about ten o'clock the next morning. This service is the one used by SDC for delivering finished announcements to USOE under the current contract. Using this service, someone from the Copyrights Office could mail the printed announcements to a contractor in one of these cities, and the contractor could mail the announcements to the publishers. In most cases, the announcements could be in the mail to publishers on the same day they were received by the contractor.

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